

September 11

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# Victims and Heroes







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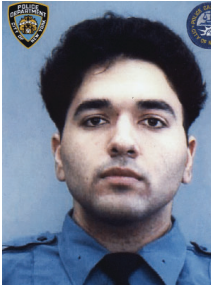
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, created a new generation of heroes for America  
and the world. They came from diverse cultures,  
and many from faraway lands, but on September 11 —  
whether they perished in the attacks or bore witness — all were victims  
and each was a hero. From Pakistan, India, China, and Nigeria,  
their stories are remarkably the same.

Human beings, not nationalities, saw strangers in need, and  
in many cases risked — and gave — their own lives in order to save another.

The global heroes of September 11  
spoke different languages, but shared a common humanity.  
These are their stories.

## Mohammad Salman Hamdani

### Pakistan



MOHAMMAD SALMAN HAMDANI was born in Karachi, Pakistan, and moved to America when he was only 13 months old. Equally proud of his Muslim heritage and American citizenship, Mr. Hamdani was a compassionate and warm-hearted young man whose greatest desire in life was to help others. And he did just that on September 11, even though it cost him his life.

September 11, 2001, began as any other day for the 23-year-old New Yorker. He got on the train to go to his research job at Rockefeller University, but then disappeared. No one was sure what became of Salman Hamdani until six months later, on March 20, 2002, when his remains were positively identified at the site of the World Trade Center. It is believed that the part-time ambulance driver, police cadet, and incoming medical student heard about the attack on his way to work and immediately rushed over to see

if he could help. "That's him," his mother, Talaat, now says. "He would have gone down anyway, even if he were home. No matter where he was, even if he were in California, he would have flown down to help."

While fiercely proud of his American citizenship, Salman Hamdani, like so many Americans, was equally proud of his immigrant roots. "He was very proud of being Muslim," his mother, Talaat, says. She tells of how her husband used to pick up young Salman and his two brothers from school every Friday at 1 p.m. so they could go pray, as required by Islam. But when he reached the ninth grade, Salman suddenly found he had tests every Friday, preventing him from leaving school. "He was very sad," his mother says, remembering the time. "He was upset when he couldn't pray." As Salman grew older, he became increasingly proud of his Muslim and Pakistani heritage.

"This tragedy  
really united  
and reunited  
the diversity  
in America."

*(Above) Salman Hamdani as a New York Police Department cadet.  
(Right) The Hamdani family in 1987: Talaat and Saleem with sons Adnaan, Zeshan, and Salman.*



While he grew up speaking English in the home, on becoming a teenager, Salman learned to speak the Urdu language of his parents. He also wanted to learn how to read Urdu, his mother says, but never had the time.

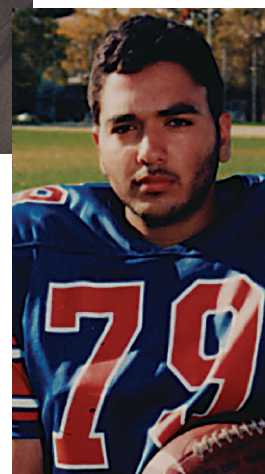
"He was a regular American," Mrs. Hamdani says of her son Salman. *Star Wars* was one of his favorite films, and his license plate read "Yung Jedi." She remembers when he applied for medical school the first time around and didn't get accepted. His father told him he might have better luck applying to schools in Pakistan or the Caribbean, but Salman said no. "If I become a physician," he told his father, "it's going to be on American soil." Asked why her son was so adamant about studying in the United States, Mrs. Hamdani replied, "He was just so proud to be an American." (Salman Hamdani

was subsequently accepted to medical school in the United States, but died before he could attend.) One thing did trouble the young man, however. Having been born on foreign soil, he was ineligible to be president, as the U.S. Constitution requires that the chief executive be born on American soil.

Hamdani sees the heroic kindness exhibited by her son, and so many others from all over the world on September 11, as a larger message. "This tragedy really united and reunited the diversity in America," she says. "[Those who died on September 11] were all in a very precarious situation, but what mattered to them was that they are all human beings... We have to make the world realize that they were all human," she says. "They are just human like you are." ❧



Salman Hamdani's mother has only recently begun reading her son's journals, and was particularly touched by something her son wrote when he was just 14 years old: "Why do people mistake kindness and sympathy for weakness?" Mrs.



*(Above) The Hamdani brothers at a wedding in July 2001: (left to right) Zeshan, Salman, and Adnaan. (Far right) Salman Hamdani in his high school football uniform. (Right) Salman Hamdani's April 2002 funeral services at a mosque in Manhattan. Attendees included (right to left) New York Police Commissioner Kelly, Mayor Bloomberg, and the NYPD's Imam Pasha. Also attending were 1,000 police cadets.*



## Sankara S. Velamuri

India



“He never thought  
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people, different  
nationalities.”

ON SEPTEMBER 11, Sankara Velamuri called his wife from the 86th floor of the World Trade Center to say he was all right, and that everyone was leaving the building. But in fact, the Indian immigrant stayed behind to care for Dianne Gladstone and Yeshavant Tembe, two friends and coworkers who were seriously injured. That act of kindness cost him his life.

Mr. Velamuri's selflessness was no surprise to those who knew him. “He had a divine nature,” his wife, Vasanta, says. “He helped so many people, no matter what.” He would always tell her: “Do good to other people. If they need it, you have to go and do it. God will give the help.” Mrs. Velamuri remembers how her husband “always kept lot of families in his apartment” who were

*Sankara Velamuri with his  
wife, Vasanta.*





down on their luck. “Blacks, whites, Indian people... if they don't have any job, if he came across anybody.” She remembers one man her husband housed for six months in his apartment. “He met him in the railway station and told him, ‘come to my apartment, don't worry about it.’ He never thought we were different people, different nationalities.

“They miss him so much because he never behaved like a supervisor,” his wife, Vasanta, says of her husband's coworkers. “He behaved like a human being.” After her husband's death, the outpouring of love and support she received from his colleagues spoke volumes about her husband. “I didn't know any of them,” she says. “They are very special, professional. After this they were calling me, he was like a family member. He was involved in their personal problems. He could understand the people, what they're going through. He always liked to extend his hand, to help other people — he used to treat other people like family members, and at the end of his last breath, he sacrificed his life.”

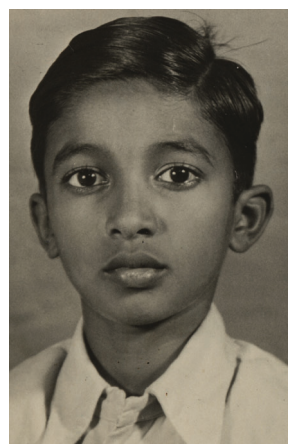
Since that time, Mrs. Velamuri learned something about America as well. “I love this country because when we need help, they become

like a human being,” she now says in response to the support she received following her husband's death. “Sometimes we are immigrants, and we feel like we are Indians and no one cares, but that's not true. From their heart, [Americans]



*(Left) Sankara Velamuri at an office picnic. (Below) Sankara Velamuri at eight years of age in India.*

are willing to help and support every aspect of life, whatever we need; that's what I'm getting... The human nature is the same, no matter black or white, everyone's the same. No matter what nation you're from, we are here like brothers and sisters. God, this is a great country.” ❧



## Rose Riso

### Italy



ON SEPTEMBER 11, Rose Riso was both a hero and a victim. The daughter of an Italian immigrant, Ms. Riso was what New Yorkers call “a tough cookie” — meaning she was strong-willed and always kept her composure, even under pressure. Fortunately for her coworkers on the 86th floor of the south tower of the World Trade Center, the committed approach Ms. Riso took toward her job as fire marshal for her office is credited with saving tens if not hundreds of lives on September 11.

Diane Fattah is one of several coworkers whom Rose Riso is credited with saving on September 11. American Airlines Flight 11 had just hit the north tower, and Ms. Fattah, working in the south tower at the time, was not sure what to do. “I was putting my files away,” she says of the moments following the explosion in the tower next door.

Like many people in the World Trade Center that day, Ms. Fattah and her coworkers didn’t realize the full gravity of the peril they faced. “I didn’t see the danger, I had no idea of the magnitude,” she said. But Rose Riso did, and went into action. “Rose told me, in plain words, ‘get out, get out right now, stop it,’” Ms. Fattah says. “When we used to have the fire drill, she would put the little red hat on and get the little whistle. I was just about to tease her that day and say ‘where’s your hat and whistle?’ And I didn’t get a chance because she was yelling at me to get out. She told us to get off the phone, don’t call people, get out, call them downstairs... It was only 35 seconds [after Ms. Fattah boarded the elevator that the second plane hit], that was it, that made the difference between me living and dying. If she hadn’t have been there, no, I would have took my time.”

“I can't fill  
her shoes.  
I'm not Rose.”

*(Above) Rose Riso's badge, found in the ruins of the World Trade Center. (Right) Rose Riso with coworker Mary Jos, who was severely burned on September 11 but survived. (Far right) Rose Riso's cats, Timmy and Ricky.*



According to Diane Fattah, Rose Riso was tough, but she had a soft side. "She was helpful in every which way, but she was, you know, a tough cookie," Ms. Fattah says. "But she really wasn't. If I asked her for anything, it'd be done immediately. If I wanted to know something, it was already done. And if she didn't know the answer to a question, she made sure she found out. [She was] a straightforward-type person, she held no punches. A little tough, but once you got to know her, she wasn't really tough." Ms. Fattah says that although Ms. Riso was unmarried and had no children of her own, she loved her two cats, Timmy and Ricky, just like family. "She had two cats that she loved like her children," Ms. Fattah says. "I'm not a pet lover, but I knew that she loved her cats, so I asked about her cats, and she'd tell me all about them. I knew that's what interested her."

Rose Riso's brother, Peter, is heartbroken over the loss of his sister. "She was the crutch in the family," he says. "The one who went to college, got her degree. She was able to take care of the family affairs." Ms. Riso was also a very intelligent woman, according to both her brother and coworkers. Diane Fattah remembers with a smile how Rose Riso always said something witty to her in the morning, and how Ms. Fattah would

scheme all day to come up with an equally witty comeback. But most importantly, Rose Riso was someone who cared more about others than herself. "You may ask yourself



why didn't Rose make it out since she had been so adamant about the urgency of leaving the building immediately," Ms. Fattah says. "Well if you knew Rose, you knew the answer to that question. She took being our office fire warden as a serious responsibility. And as long as there were coworkers in the office, she would not abandon them." And she didn't.

Rose Riso loved her job at the World Trade Center. "She enjoyed the Trade Center prestige," her brother says. "Just like you say you're working at the White House. Really something special." To date, Peter Riso has yet to hold a memorial for his lost sister, though he understands that sooner or later he must accept her fate. Mr. Riso says that after September 11, "Mom would have told me 'go find Rose.'" He's been trying to do that every day since, still with no luck. Ms. Riso's remains have yet to be found, and all that Peter Riso has of his sister is her photo identification badge, uncovered in the wreckage of the World Trade Center, remarkably intact. Nowadays, Peter Riso is trying to go on with his life as a butcher in New York's Upper East Side, but it is tough for him. "I can't fill her shoes," he says of his sister. "I'm not Rose." ♣



(Top) Rose Riso's brother, Peter, holding her work identification card. (Above) A family photo album shows a young Rose Riso with her parents and brother (top), at her junior high school graduation (bottom left), and at a reunion of 60 families who immigrated to America from the same small town in Sicily (bottom right).



## Eli Chalouh

### Syria



ELI CHALOUH has been missing since September 11, 2001. The 23-year-old Syrian immigrant left home early that morning for his new job on the 86th floor of the World Trade Center — he'd only started working there six weeks before — and was never heard from since, nor was his body ever found. His father, Youssef, still holds out hope that his son wasn't at the Twin Towers that day, but others are mourning the loss of a close friend.

Eli Chalouh's two best friends at the office simply can't say enough about their young coworker.

"I considered him like my own son, because I have one of my children his age," says Baher Shaarawy, an Egyptian Muslim who immigrated to the United States and whose son is now a gunnery sergeant in the U.S. Marines. "He was a very bright man."

"Eli was such a delightful young man," says his friend Joseph Botros, who is also originally from Egypt, from a Christian family. "He is full of life, full of future. You look at him always with such a nice smile on his face. He used to come in the morning and say 'good morning,' you'd feel that this day will be better because such a young beautiful man is in the office. He always gives a hand to anybody without asking. You feel the future is him. He's always smiling, always full of life, hoping for better future for everybody; he has a golden heart."

"We're all  
human beings,  
all God's  
children."

*(Above) Eli Chalouh at his Bar Mitzvah.  
(Right) Eli Chalouh's friends Joseph Botros  
(left) and Baher Shaarawy (right).*





“One of a kind, really he was one of a kind. We felt a great loss for every one of our coworkers, but especially him. Because with him it’s like losing a son or a younger brother. The rest of them, we love them dearly, but him, he was so special to all of us.”

Baher Shaarawy, Joseph Botros, and Eli Chalouh used to always joke about the fact that, in spite of their different religions, they were best of friends. Every morning Mr. Chalouh would greet his Egyptian friends by the names Hassan and Murqos, alluding to a well-known Egyptian comedy entitled “Hassan, Murqos, and Cohen,” which depicts the camaraderie between three close

friends: a Muslim, a Christian, and a Jew.

Mr. Shaarawy and Mr. Botros say that their close friendship with Eli Chalouh was only natural. “Human being is human being,” Mr. Botros says. “We don’t care about religion or what country you come from.” Mr. Shaarawy agrees. “We consider ourselves very lucky to be in the

United States, because being in the United States they give you the chance to be open minded and to love everybody — Christian, Jews, Muslim, other religions. We’re all human beings, all God’s children.”

While Eli Chalouh always enjoyed sharing a joke with friends, he had a serious side as well. His friends and family members call him a hard worker who was driven by an incredible desire and ability to achieve. His brother Victor remembers how Eli would work an eight-hour shift as a stock boy, then go to night school from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., and finally return home to hours more of study. And the work paid off. Eli Chalouh only recently graduated from Long Island University with an accounting degree, and honors. “He’s a very persistent boy,” his brother says. “He knows his goal in life. He tried to use every minute in his life. And he achieved something.... We miss him very much. What can you do?” *■*



*(Top) Photos of Eli Chalouh with friends and fellow students. (Above, left to right) Eli Chalouh’s brothers, Victor and Rafi, and his father, Youssef.*

## Godwin Ajala

### Nigeria

“When this thing happened he had every chance of running out, but he went in to help people out.”



*(Above) Godwin Ajala, former security guard at the World Trade Center*

GODWIN AJALA wasn't in the World Trade Center when it was attacked, yet he still died a hero on that day. The 33-year-old Nigerian immigrant was patrolling the grounds outside the Twin Towers on September 11, but as soon as he saw the explosion from the first plane, he ran inside to see if he could help, and disappeared when the towers fell. After searching for him in vain for three days, his best friend, Christopher Iwuanyanwu, got a call from the hospital on September 14: Mr. Ajala was alive, the nurse told him, but in a coma. Twenty-four hours later, he died.

“Godwin is a nice guy,” says Christopher Iwuanyanwu, who has known Godwin Ajala for the past four years. “He is very caring, obedient, and he works hard. We worked hand in hand as brothers. We shared things together. I took him as my brother.” Both men worked in security at the World Trade Center, but their shifts overlapped, so Mr. Iwuanyanwu was just heading home — and Mr. Ajala was already patrolling the Trade Center grounds — when the first plane hit. Instead of running away and saving his own life, Mr. Ajala entered the building. “When this thing happened, he had every chance of running out,” Mr. Iwuanyanwu says of his friend. “But he went in to help





people out. The last people that saw him were telling him: ‘Why are you here? Why are you here?’ And he was telling them: ‘Why are you running, why don’t you help people out?’”

Like many immigrants, Godwin Ajala came to America in order to help support his family back home in Nigeria, where he had a wife and three small children. He was a lawyer in Nigeria and was studying to pass the U.S. bar exam. “All his ambition is just to become a lawyer in the United States,” his friend Christopher Iwuanyanwu says, and Mr. Ajala spent much of his free time either studying or

reading. Mr. Ajala had planned to pass the bar, have his family come over for his swearing-in as an attorney, and then apply for U.S. citizenship this year.

Christopher Iwuanyanwu says that Godwin Ajala was always someone you could count on. “He’s kind and caring, and he hates cheating,” his friend says. “He’s somebody who stands on the truth. That’s why a lot of our friends, they were all crying, angry because of how he died,

because this is somebody who doesn’t stand for something wrong, he’s always telling the truth.” Mr. Iwuanyanwu went on to explain that his friend was not even supposed to be at the Trade Center on the day he was injured. “Godwin goes home to Nigeria every September 10,” Mr. Iwuanyanwu says. “He planned on leaving September 10, but didn’t have enough money. He said okay, let him work up until the end of September, then go home. He didn’t know such a thing would happen.” ■

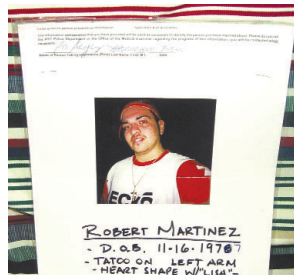


*(Top) Christopher Iwuanyanwu looking at photos of his lost friend Godwin. (Above right) Godwin Ajala at his graduation from law school in Nigeria. (Right) Godwin Ajala working at a friend’s home.*



## Robert Martinez

Peru/Ireland



ROBERT MARTINEZ was born in Boston in 1978 to a Peruvian father and an Irish mother. But on September 11, 2001, he was pure New Yorker, becoming both victim and hero that day. Robert had worked in security at the World Trade Center for two years. His father, Gabriel, says that after the planes hit the Twin Towers, “they told Robert to leave, he said okay, but returned to help more people, and the building collapsed.” The friendly, hard-working, 23 year old died that day, and was laid to rest on April 15, 2002. He leaves behind his parents, a fiancée, Lisa, and a five-year-old son, Jonathan.

Mr. Martinez still  
can't bring himself  
to visit the site  
where the World  
Trade Center stood...  
The memory is still  
too fresh.



*(Above) The “missing” flyer that Robert Martinez’s family posted around New York City.  
(Right) Robert Martinez and his son, Jonathan.*





Robert's father, Gabriel, remembers the last time he saw his son, on September 10, 2001. Robert came by to play basketball with friends, then visit his parents at their home in Astoria, Queens — as he did almost every day after work. That visit was like any other, his father says. Robert dropped by for a bit, then around six o'clock said goodbye for the last time. His father still cannot bring himself to visit the site where the World Trade Center stood, nor can he manage a visit to Manhattan. The memory is still too fresh.

In the corner of their small Astoria, Queens, apartment, Robert Martinez's parents keep a makeshift

altar to their son. The altar includes a number of photos of Robert, one of the Twin Towers, several religious icons, a votive candle, a small Statue of Liberty, and a bouquet of flowers. The altar also contains a small, framed flag accompanied by a plaque indicating

that it traveled on the space shuttle *Endeavour* and was given to Robert's parents by the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) "in appreciation for the sacrifices you endured." Below the altar, the Martinez family keeps the toys of Robert's only son, five-year-old Jonathan. Among the toys: an airplane, an ambulance, a police car, three Spiderman figures, and three fire trucks.

Gabriel Martinez's plans for Robert are now gone. He had hoped that some day Robert would visit Peru, where Mr. Martinez was born. Robert also had planned to switch careers and move into computers, but now that will never happen. And, eventually, Robert and his fiancée, Lisa, had planned to marry, but they had not yet set a date. ☪



*(Above) An altar that the Martinez family keeps in memory of their son, Robert. (Right) Robert Martinez at a birthday party in younger days (with tall white hat). (Far right) Robert's son, Jonathan, plays with his grandparents.*

## Henry Li

### China



“People  
consoling each  
other.”

WHEN HENRY LI ARRIVED at his office on the 86th floor of 2 World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, he had no idea that within an hour he’d be saving a coworker’s life. The 52-year-old Hong Kong immigrant remembers that it was a particularly beautiful day as he booted up his computer and went to talk to his supervisor. Suddenly he heard a loud noise just upstairs — a boom like a bomb — and saw a fireball outside the window. Soon thereafter, Rose Riso, a coworker who was also the floor fire marshal, told everybody to get out in case the smoke from the explosion came in to their building.

“We were very calm, not in a panic state,” Mr. Li remembers. “This had never happened before. This was the next building; it would not affect us so fast,” he remembers thinking at the time. No one knew that in 15 minutes the next plane would hit their building as well, effectively trapping anyone remaining. Worse yet, an announcement came on the loudspeakers telling everyone to go back to their desks. “The building is secure,” he recalls the announcement saying. “We have information that a plane hit another building. This building is secure. Please go back to your work station and wait for further instructions.” Mr. Li didn’t think the announcement made any sense, so he took an elevator to the ground floor to see what was going on. “Right before the door closed, a few people came in,” he says. “Those were the people who were lucky.” No one knew it would be the last elevator to leave the floor before the second plane hit, trapping those remaining.

*(Above) Henry Li standing in front of an American flag.*



When he arrived on the ground floor, there was debris everywhere. Mr. Li saw his coworker Diane Fattah. “She don’t know what to do,” he says. “So we walk out together.” That’s when the second plane hit. “Like a bomb hit right on top of our head as the second plane hit our building,” he says. “Big explosion on top of our head. So I saw Diane, I grabbed Diane, and I just run. I run.” Ms. Fattah credits Henry Li with helping save her life that day. “I was scared, and Henry saw that in my face; he took my hand,” she says. “If he didn’t come take my hand, I could have been hit with debris or anything else, or maybe I wouldn’t have made it out.”

But Henry Li wasn’t the only helping hand that day. So many of those in the Twin Towers, and those on the streets below, did what they could to help strangers in need. “One thing I found, people are very helping each other,” Mr. Li says about that day. “Offering bottled water, bathrooms, bring out chairs. People consoling each other.” 🐼



*(Above) Diane Fattah, who survived the September 11 attack with the help of coworkers, including Henry Li.  
(Below) Henry Li and Diane Fattah.*



## Dr. Taufik Kassis

### Syria



P A K I S T A N I - A M E R I C A N

"If they wanted to  
make a point,  
God gave us brain  
and tongue so we  
can communicate  
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if you have it, but  
not in criminal act."

WHEN DR. TAUFIK KASSIS arrived in the United States from Syria in 1998, he never expected to play a key role in helping treat victims of the largest terrorist attack in American history. Dr. Kassis now says that he only did what anyone else would have done in his place, but many consider the young Middle Eastern doctor a hero of September 11.

"I was doing my residency in Jersey City Medical Center, and it's just across the river from the World Trade Center," Dr. Kassis says. "We were informed that we were going to receive some victims from the towers. So the ferry, which usually used to take tourists around, was just transporting victims for us to our hospital." Dr. Kassis says that all the staff of the hospital stayed for extra shifts in order to treat the several hundred victims they received, and that he himself did a little extra duty even after he was supposed to be home for the night. "Even after I went home, I came back around 11 p.m. I just wanted to check if there were any more [injured]." But by 10 p.m., there

simply were no more survivors. “We were disappointed when we stopped getting more victims... We thought that we might be working the whole night helping the victims, and when the number started to go down and down, we realized that there were no more survivors probably.”

Many now consider Dr. Kassis a hero — a fact he finds flattering, but not necessarily appropriate. “I feel happy, of course, about hearing that. But I feel that it’s my duty, it’s my pleasure,” Dr. Kassis says. “First, being a doctor, I think that’s our duty. Second, just thinking about how inhuman that what happened, and I thought that I could have been in that tower at that moment. I’ve never visited the towers; I was planning to visit it one day, probably it would have happened on a day that I was there visiting with my family. Just seeing the visitors, honest people which had nothing to do with politics or anything, got killed and affected,

that was very very horrible. Whoever did that was very unhuman and stupid. If they wanted to make a point, God gave us brain and tongue so we can communicate and prove our point if you have it, but not in criminal act. So it was very shocking to me.”

Dr. Kassis also credits his Middle Eastern upbringing for instilling the values that made him want to help on that day. “If you go to visit any of the Middle Eastern countries as American, you’ll be surprised how much people will try to help you in the street,” Dr. Kassis says. “You’ll be shocked, actually, if you walk there and you have a question or you are lost or anything, people will just guide you, help for you.” He goes on to note that he “was raised up in a culture to respect humanity in common. To respect especially the country you are living in, regardless if you are citizen or not. We were raised up in a way to care about others.” On September 11, caring about another individual he didn’t know was exactly what Dr. Kassis did. ♣

## Wilfred Amanfu

### Ghana



"I actually saw  
people dropping off  
from the first  
building."

ON SEPTEMBER 11, Wilfred Amanfu lost one of his best friends, a coworker and fellow Ghanaian immigrant named Japhet Aryee. Aryee was a track star in Ghana who came to the United States to study accounting and decided to stay. Yet in spite of losing such a close friend that day, Mr. Amanfu's level-headedness in the face of danger saved his own life and the lives of countless strangers.

Mr. Amanfu remembers that morning: "I was walking straight to my boss's desk, and his desk was by the window," he says. "By the time I said 'good morning,' he didn't even say good morning back, and we heard a boom, and there was this big ball of fire out there. The fire kind of shot toward our building,

and our building swayed back and forth. For the moment, I hit the floor, and I came back up and looked outside, and I saw a big hole on the building, Building One. Everybody who was looking outside said that's a bomb. At that time, all I knew was to get out of the place, so I started going outside."

That's when he saw Margarita Mahil, a coworker originally from the Dominican Republic. "Because Margarita was new [on the job], she didn't know what to do. So I yelled at her, 'get out of here,' so she followed me," he says. At first, Ms. Mahil took her friend Wilfred's advice and began leaving the building via the stairwell. But then she heard an announcement saying everything was all right, and that everyone should return to their offices. So she tried to do just that.



*(Above) Wilfred Amanfu in front of a plaque commemorating his 40 coworkers killed by the September 11 attacks. (Right) Margarita Mahil credits Wilfred Amanfu with saving her life on September 11.*



That's when the second plane hit, fortunately before she was able to return to her floor. "Had Wilfred not told me to get out, I would have been sitting with everybody [on the 86th floor] when the second plane hit," trapping her on that floor until the building collapsed.

But Margarita Mahil was not the only person Wilfred Amanfu helped that day. Mr. Amanfu was on the 66th floor, descending the stairs, when the building was hit by the second plane. "All of a sudden, we heard a boom again," he says. "For some reason, I wasn't afraid, I did not panic, and I started controlling people to stay on the stairways." Mr. Amanfu says he kept urging his colleagues to "keep on going, don't stop, keep going, don't stop, keep going." He says that it took him 45 minutes to get out of the building, and shortly thereafter it collapsed.



"I was one of the lucky persons," he says.

But how did Wilfred Amanfu know to leave the building, even when the authorities were saying everything was safe? "I saw the fire, the first explosion," he says. "I actually saw people dropping off from the first building. To me that was enough to tell you something's happening. And again, I say, I believe in God. It was intuition and God talking to me, saying 'Wilfred, get out.'" 🐦



*(Above) Wilfred Amanfu in his new, temporary office in Manhattan. (Left) Wilfred Amanfu and Margarita Mahil.*

Jan Demczur

Poland



“Why they attack  
the World Trade  
Center with the  
civilians working?”

JAN DEMCZUR’S quick thinking and perseverance saved not only his own life on September 11 but the lives of several men he didn’t even know. Mr. Demczur came to the United States from Poland in 1980, and since 1991 had worked as a window cleaner at the World Trade Center. He remembers riding the elevator past the 44th floor of the north tower the morning of September 11, when something suddenly went wrong. “Elevator went up, and couple seconds later, not even a minute, elevator started going down, dropped several floors,” Mr. Demczur now says. “We looked at each other like something wrong.” (In fact, American Airlines Flight 11 had just hit their building.) Mr. Demczur says they tried the emergency stop button, tried the intercom, but nothing worked. The elevator shook hard from side to side, a voice came on the intercom saying there had been a problem on the 91st floor, and then things got decidedly worse.

"I saw the smoke coming up from bottom [of the elevator]," Jan Demczur says. "Your heart start beating faster. We didn't know if anyone was coming to help. Intercom started breaking up. He didn't hear us. No more voice. We just looked at each other, and what you going to do, the smoke coming, we have to do something." One man pounded on the roof. Nothing. Two of them then pried the elevator door open and started kicking the wall. But it was no use. More smoke was now seeping in, and the air was getting hot.

The men knew they had to break through the wall, but no one had a knife or any other tool. That's when Mr. Demczur thought of his squeegee. He took off the handle and started scratching the wall. "He kept working at it with this squeegee," said Alfred Smith, one of the occupants of the elevator.

"It was like he was meant to do that... like he had a willpower that we are going to get out of here." The four men took turns and finally dug deep enough that they were able to kick through the wall to a 50th floor bathroom. The men then fled the building, only five minutes before it came crashing to the ground.

Mr. Demczur had only just sat down on a curb to register what had happened when the second tower began to fall. "I looked back and I see antennas going down, and tower start falling," he says. "In this point, I scared. I say I'm gonna die here now, the tower is so tall and I too close. I don't know which way tower gonna fall, but when I saw antenna was being right my direction, I said 'God I'm dying here.' I start faster, I run faster, I run maybe like three blocks. And I keep always eyes behind my shoulder which way the building going. And I see it not going nowhere, just sliding down floor by floor, I just heard the bang bang bang."

"At this point, I was shaking. So pain. I was just pray to God, 'thank you God, you help me get out, you keep the building longer, get me out from building.' But lot of people doesn't make it, and I was worried about people. When I know that lot of people escape but not everybody, I said 'wow, boy, what's going on here, who did this, for what reason, why they attack the World Trade Center with the civilians working?'" *■*





Jeremiah Ahern



Ernest Alikakos



Yvette Anderson



Japhet Aryee



Steven Berger



Eli Chalouh



Florence Cohen



James Domanico



Sareve Dukat



Clyde Frazier, Jr.



Dianne Gladstone



Harry Goody



Yan Z (Cindy) Guan



Marian Hrycak



Neil Lai



Stephen Lefkowitz



Tyrone May



Robert Miller



Oscar Nesbitt



Michael Ou



Dennis Pierce



William Pohlmann



Gerard Rauzi



Rose Riso



Jon Schmitt



Barry Skowitz



York Tashan



Dorothy Temple



Diane Urban



William Valcarcel



Sankara Velamuri



Yuk Ping Wong

### A Legacy for the Future

As we at the Tax Department begin to move forward in the wake of the tragedy at the World Trade Center, let us reflect on the seeds of goodness that have been left behind.

For there has been much goodness in the wake of this horror, as we have responded with kindness, courage, generosity and determination. I've been struck with awe at the courage of the employees directly affected by this terrible event; I've been overwhelmed by the generosity of employees who made contributions of all kinds to disaster relief; and I've been inspired by the skill, compassion and dedication of employees throughout the Department in providing services to the victims and their families, and in staffing the State Emergency Management Office phones. Just as importantly, I am grateful to those who have so calmly and competently kept our operations afloat in the midst of this crisis. And as I list just a few of these extraordinary contributions, I know that there are many, many more.

The 39 men and women from the Tax Department who were lost on that awful day and the one who subsequently lost his life have left behind a legacy that we dare not squander, and I invite you to join me in celebrating their lives with the gift they have given us. We have bonded together and learned to care about and support one another in a way that we never have before. We have put aside petty differences and worked together as one, and have learned to focus on the things in life that are really important — the love we have to share, our health, our children, and much more. Our lives have been changed forever, but it's less about airport security and Wall Street than it is about becoming the best that we can become.

As we move forward — for we must — we have an obligation to those we have lost to embrace the future with renewed vigor, unity and compassion for one another and those we serve.

Arthur J. Rossi



Chow Lam



Hyunjoon (Paul) Lee



Myoung Lee



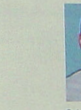
Charles Mills



Richard Muccio



Richard Moore



Salvatore Papasso



Diane Parsons

ON SEPTEMBER 11, VERY FEW of those working in the State of New York tax office on the 86th floor of the World Trade Center knew how serious the situation really was. A plane had hit the tower next to them, but the authorities had announced that everything was okay, and that everyone should return to their desks. Thanks to a number of heroes — especially Rose Riso, the office fire marshal — many of the employees ignored the announcement and started evacuating. That decision likely saved their lives, for within a few minutes a second airplane crashed into their building, trapping the remaining coworkers on the 86th floor. The tax office lost 40 people to the September 11 attacks. Their coworkers continue to honor them to this day.

These are only a sampling of the stories of the victims of September 11. An estimated 2,830 people

died or are missing in the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Center. Ninety-eight percent of those victims were at work, and the youngest was only two and a half years old. One in six — 494 — were reportedly either foreigners or Americans with dual citizenship, hailing from more than 90 countries. In the attack on the Pentagon, 189 were killed, and in a field in Pennsylvania, another 45 died when their plane plummeted to earth due to the efforts of a small group of heroes who wanted to avert another crash into a building full of people.

Whether they were in New York, Virginia, or Pennsylvania, the victims and heroes of September 11 represented the diversity that is America and the world. All will be missed. None will be forgotten. *✶*

*(Left) A publication honoring the 40 members of the New York State tax audit office killed in the September 11 attacks.*

*Photos by John Aravosis except for the following: Pages 4-5, courtesy of the Hamdani family; 6-7, courtesy of the Velamuri family; 8, bottom left and bottom right, courtesy of the Riso family; 9, bottom, courtesy of the Riso family; 10, top, courtesy of the Chalouh family; 12, courtesy of the Ajala family; 13, center and bottom, courtesy of the Ajala family; 14, bottom, courtesy of the Martinez family; 15 bottom, courtesy of the Martinez family; 18, courtesy of the Service Employees International Union; 22, courtesy of the Service Employees International Union.*

